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**REMARKS**

**Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton  
Gala Dinner Celebrating the U.S.-Islamic World Forum  
Hosted by the Brookings Institution and the State of Qatar**

**April 12, 2011  
Andrew W. Mellon Auditorium  
Washington, D.C.**

**SECRETARY CLINTON:** Good evening, everyone. And let me thank you, Strobe, for that introduction and for your many years of friendship. It is such a pleasure for me to join you at this first U.S.-Islamic World Forum held in America. His Highness the Amir and the people of Qatar have generously hosted the Forum for years. And as Strobe said, I was honored to be a guest in Doha last year. And now I am delighted to welcome you to Washington. I want to thank Martin Indyk, Ken Pollack and the Saban Center at the Brookings Institution for keeping this event going and growing. And I want to acknowledge all my colleagues in the diplomatic corps who are here tonight, including the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Qatar, the Foreign Minister of Jordan, and the Secretary General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

Over the years, the U.S.-Islamic World Forum has offered the chance to celebrate the diverse achievements of Muslims around the world. From Qatar – which is pioneering innovative energy solutions and preparing to host the World Cup – to countries as varied as Turkey, Senegal, Indonesia, and Malaysia, each offering its own model for prosperity and progress.

This Forum also offers a chance to discuss the equally diverse set of challenges we face together – the need to confront violent extremism, the urgency of achieving a two-state solution between Israel and the Palestinians, the importance of embracing tolerance and universal human rights in all of our communities.

And I am especially proud that this year the Forum is recognizing the contributions of the millions of American Muslims who do so much to make our country strong. As President Obama said in Cairo, “Islam has always been a part of American history,” and every day Americans Muslims are helping to write our story.

I do not need to tell this distinguished audience that we are meeting at an historic time for one region in particular: the Middle East and North Africa. Today, the long Arab winter has begun

to thaw. For the first time in decades, there is a real opportunity for lasting change, a real opportunity for people to have their voices heard and their priorities addressed.

Now, this raises significant questions for us all:

Will the people and leaders of the Middle East and North Africa pursue a new, more inclusive approach to solving the region's persistent political, economic, and social challenges? Will they consolidate the progress of recent weeks and address long-denied aspirations for dignity and opportunity? Or, when we meet again at this Forum in one year or five years or ten, will we have seen the prospects for reform fade and remember this moment as just a mirage in the desert?

Now, these questions can only be answered by the people and leaders of the Middle East and North Africa themselves. The United States certainly does not have all the answers. In fact, here in Washington we're struggling to thrash out answers to our own difficult political and economic questions. But America is committed to working as a partner to help unlock the region's potential and to help realize its hopes for change.

Now, much has been accomplished already. Uprisings across the region have exposed myths that for too long were used to justify a stagnant status quo. You know the myth that governments can hold on to power without responding to their people's aspirations or respecting their rights; the myth that the only way to produce change in the region is through violence and conflict; and, most pernicious of all, the myth that Arabs do not share universal human aspirations for freedom, dignity, and opportunity.

Today's new generation of young people rejects these false narratives. And as we know and as we have seen, they will not accept the status quo. Despite the best efforts of the censors, they are connecting to the wider world in ways that their parents and grandparents could never imagine. They now see alternatives, on satellite news, on Twitter and Facebook, in Cairo and Tunis. They know a better life can be within reach – and they are now willing to reach for it.

But these young people have inherited a region that in many ways is unprepared to meet their growing expectations. Its challenges have been well documented in a series of landmark Arab Human Development Reports, independently authored and published by the United Nations Development Program. These reports represent the cumulative knowledge of leading Arab scholars and intellectuals. Answering these challenges will help determine if this historic moment lives up to its promise. That is why this January in Doha, just weeks after a desperate, young, Tunisian street vendor set fire to himself in public protest, I talked with the leaders of the region about the need to move faster to meet their people's needs and aspirations.

In the 21st century, the material conditions of people's lives have greater impact on national stability and security than ever before. It is not possible for people not to know what is happening beyond their own small village. And the balance of power is no longer measured by counting tanks or missiles alone. Now strategists must factor in the growing influence of citizens themselves – connected, organized, and often frustrated.

There was a time when those of us who championed civil society or worked with marginalized minorities or on behalf of women, or were focused on young people and technology, were told that our concerns were noble but not urgent. That is another false narrative that has been washed away. Because these issues – among others – are at the heart of smart power – and they have to be at the center of any discussion attempting to answer the region’s most pressing questions.

First, can the leaders and citizens of the region reform economies that are now overly dependent on oil exports and stunted by corruption? Overall, Arab countries were less industrialized in 2007 than they were in 1970. Unemployment often runs more than double the worldwide average, and even worse for women and young people. While a growing number of Arabs live in poverty, crowded into slums without sanitation, safe water, or reliable electricity, a small elite has increasingly concentrated control of the region’s land and wealth in their hands. The 2009 Arab Development Report found that these trends – and I quote – “result in the ominous dynamics of marginalization.”

Reversing this dynamic means grappling with a second question: How to match economic reform with political and social change? According to the 2009 Global Integrity Report, Arab countries, almost without exception, have some of the weakest anti-corruption systems in the world. Citizens have spent decades under martial law or emergency rule. Political parties and civil society groups are subject to repression and restriction. Judicial systems are far from either free or independent. And elections, when they are held, are often rigged.

And this leads to a third and often-overlooked question: Will the door to full citizenship and participation finally open to women and minorities? The first Arab Human Development Report in 2002 found that Arab women’s political and economic participation was the lowest in the world. Successive reports have shown little progress. The 2005 report called women’s empowerment – and I quote again – a “prerequisite for an Arab renaissance, inseparably and causally linked to the fate of the Arab world.”

Now, this is not a matter of the role of religion in women’s lives. Muslim women have long enjoyed greater rights and opportunities in places like Bangladesh or Indonesia. Or consider the family law in Morocco or the personal status code in Tunisia. Communities from Egypt to Jordan to Senegal are beginning to take on entrenched practices like child marriage, honor crimes, and female cutting. All over the world we see living proof that Islam and women’s rights are compatible. But unfortunately, there are some who are actually working to undermine this progress and export a virulently anti-woman ideology to other Muslim communities.

Now, all of these challenges – from deep unemployment to widespread corruption to the lack of respect and opportunities for women – have fueled frustration among the region’s young people. And changing leaders alone will not be enough to satisfy them – not if cronyism and closed economies continue to choke off opportunity and participation, or if citizens can’t rely on police and the courts to protect their rights. The region’s powerbrokers, both inside and outside of government, need to step up and work with the people to craft a positive vision for the future. Generals and imams, business leaders and bureaucrats, everyone who has benefited from and reinforced the status quo, has a role to play. They also have a lot to lose if the vision vacuum is filled by extremists and rejectionists.

So a fourth crucial question is how Egypt and Tunisia should consolidate the progress that has been achieved in recent months.

Former protesters are asking: How can we stay organized and involved? Well, it will take forming political parties and advocacy coalitions. It will take focusing on working together to solve the real big problems facing both countries. In Cairo last month, I met with young activists who were passionate about their principles but still sorting out how to be practical about their politics. One veteran Egyptian journalist and dissident, Hisham Kassem, expressed concerns this week that a reluctance to move from protests to politics would, in his words, “endanger the revolution’s gains.” So he urged young people to translate their passion into a positive agenda and to use political participation to achieve it.

As the people of Egypt and Tunisia embrace the full responsibilities of citizenship, we look to transitional authorities to guarantee fundamental rights such as free assembly and expression, to provide basic security on the streets, to be transparent and inclusive.

Unfortunately, this year we have seen too many violent attacks, from Egypt to Iraq to Pakistan, that have killed dozens of religious and ethnic minorities, part of a troubling worldwide trend documented by the State Department’s Annual Human Rights Report released this past Friday. Communities around the world are struggling to strike the right balance between freedom of expression and tolerance of unpopular views. Each of us has a responsibility to defend the universal human rights of people of all faiths and creeds. And I want to applaud the Organization of the Islamic Conference for its leadership in securing the recent resolution by the United Nations Human Rights Council that takes a strong stand against discrimination and violence based upon religion or belief, but does not limit freedom of expression or worship.

In both Egypt and Tunisia, we have also seen troubling signs regarding the rights and opportunities of women. So far women have been excluded from key transitional decision-making processes. When women marched alongside men through Tahrir Square in the early days of the revolution, they were part of making the change that Egypt was seeking. When they recently walked again through the square to celebrate International Women’s Day in their new democracy, they were met by harassment and abuse. You cannot have a claim to a democracy if half the population is left out.

And we know from long experience that building a successful democracy is a never-ending task. More than 200 years after our own revolution, we are still working on it. Because real change takes time, hard work, and patience – but it is well worth the effort. As one Egyptian women’s rights activist said recently, “We will have to fight for our rights... It will be tough, and require lobbying, but that’s what democracy is all about.”

In a democracy, you have to persuade your fellow citizens, men and women alike, to go along the path that you wish to take. And we know that democracy cannot be transplanted wholesale from one country to another. People have the right and responsibility to devise their own government. But there are universal rights that apply to everyone and universal values that undergird vibrant democracies everywhere.

One lesson learned by transitions to democracy around the world is that it can be tempting to fight the old battles over and over again, rather than to focus on ensuring justice and accountability in the future. I will always remember watching Nelson Mandela at the luncheon he hosted after his inauguration as president welcome three of his former jailors. Because to him, they were as important as any king or president or prime minister who was there, because when he was powerless, when he was imprisoned, they treated him with dignity. They looked upon him as a fellow human being. It helped him to move beyond what he had suffered. He never looked back in anger, but always forward in hope.

The United States is committed to standing with the people of Egypt, Tunisia, and the region to help build sustainable democracies that will deliver real results for people who deserve them. We want to support the aspirations that are so important. On this our values and interests converge. History has shown that democracies do tend to be more stable, more peaceful, and ultimately, more prosperous. But the challenge is how we get from where we are to where we want to be.

So the fifth question for us as Americans is: How can America be an effective partner to the people of the region? How can we work together to build not just short-term stability, but long-term sustainability?

With this goal in mind, the Obama Administration began to reorient U.S. foreign policy in the region and around the world from our first days in office. We put partnerships with people, not just governments, at the center of our efforts. The Administration moved quickly to respond to recent events and to affirm the principles that guide our approach. The President and I have spoken about this on a number of occasions, most recently just late afternoon today. And I know that the President will be speaking in greater detail about America's policy in the Middle East and North Africa in the coming weeks.

And we start from the understanding that America's core interests and values have not changed, including our commitment to promote human rights, resolve longstanding conflicts, counter Iran's threats, and defeat al-Qaida and its extremist allies. This includes renewed pursuit of comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace. The status quo between Palestinians and Israelis is no more sustainable than the political systems that have crumbled in recent months. Neither Israel's future as a Jewish democratic state nor the legitimate aspirations of Palestinians can be secured without a negotiated two-state solution. And while it is a truism that only the parties themselves can make the hard choices necessary for peace, there is no substitute for continued active American leadership. And the President and I are committed to that.

We believe our concerns are shared by the people of the region. And we will continue working closely with our trusted partners – including many in this room tonight – to advance those mutual interests.

We understand that a one-sized-fits-all approach doesn't make sense in such a diverse region at such a fluid time. As I have said before, the United States has specific relationships with countries in the region. We have a decades-long friendship with Bahrain that we expect to

continue long into the future. But we have made clear that security alone cannot resolve the challenges facing them. Violence is not and cannot be the answer. A political process is – one that advances the rights and aspirations of all the citizens of Bahrain. And we have raised our concerns publicly and directly with Bahraini officials and we will continue to do so.

The United States also strongly supports the people of Yemen in their quest for greater opportunity, their pursuit of political and economic reform that will meet their aspirations. President Saleh needs to resolve the political impasse with the opposition so that meaningful political change can take place in the near term in an orderly, peaceful manner.

And as President Obama has said, we strongly condemn the violence committed against peaceful protesters by the Syrian Government over the past few weeks. President Asad and the Syrian Government must respect the rights of the Syrian people, who are demanding the freedoms that they have long been denied.

Going forward, the United States will be guided by careful consideration of all the circumstances on the ground and by our consistent values and interests, but also by something else: We believe in this region. We see no reason that it cannot be among the most progressive, prosperous, peaceful, successful regions in the world. When we look at other regions in the world that have undergone change – sometimes violent, sometimes difficult – we see no reason why this region cannot succeed.

And wherever we can, we will accelerate our work to develop stronger bonds with the people themselves – with civil society, business leaders, religious communities, women, and minorities. We are rethinking the way we do business on the ground with citizens, and we want the citizens themselves to help set the priorities. For example, as we invest in Egypt's new democracy and promote sustainable development, we are soliciting grant proposals from a wide range of local organizations. We want new partners. We want to invest in new ideas. We are exploring new ways to use connection technologies to expand dialogue and open lines of communication.

As we map out a strategy for supporting transitions already underway, we know that the people of the region have not put their lives on the line just to vote once in an election. They expect democracy to deliver jobs, sweep out corruption, extend opportunities that will help them and their children take full advantage of the global economy. So the United States will be working with people and leaders to create more open, dynamic, and diverse economies where there can be more inclusive prosperity.

In the short run, the United States will provide immediate economic assistance to help transitional democracies overcome the early challenges – including \$150 million for Egypt alone.

In the medium term, as Egypt and Tunisia continue building their democracies, we will work with our partners to support an ambitious blueprint for sustainable growth, job creation, investment, and trade. The U.S. Overseas Private Investment Corporation will provide up to \$2 billion to encourage private sector investments across the Middle East and North Africa – especially for small and medium-sized enterprises. And we look forward to working with

Congress to establish enterprise funds for Egypt and Tunisia that will support competitive markets, provide small and medium-sized businesses with access to critical low-cost capital. Our Global Entrepreneurship Program is seeking out new partners and opportunities. And we want to improve and expand the Qualified Investment Zones, which allow Egyptian companies to send exports to the United States duty-free.

To spur private sector investment, we are working with Partners for a New Beginning, an organization led by former Secretary Madeleine Albright, Muhtar Kent of Coca-Cola, and Walter Isaacson of the Aspen Institute. It was formed after President Obama's Cairo speech and includes the CEOs of companies like Intel, Cisco, and Morgan Stanley. These leaders will convene a summit at the end of May to connect American investors with partners in the region's transitional democracies, with an eye to creating more jobs and boosting trade.

Under the auspices of Partners for a New Beginning, the U.S.-North Africa Partnership for Economic Opportunity is building a network of public and private partners and programs to deepen economic integration among the countries in North Africa. This past December in Algiers, the Partnership convened more than 400 young entrepreneurs, business leaders, venture capitalists, and Diaspora leaders from the United States and North Africa. These people-to-people contacts have already helped lay the groundwork for cross-border initiatives to create jobs, train youth, and support start-ups. And there will be a follow-up meeting later this year in Morocco.

For the long term, we are discussing ways to encourage closer economic integration across the region, as well as with the United States, Europe, and the rest of the world. The Middle East and North Africa are home to rich nations with excess capital as well as poorer countries hungry for investments. Forging deeper trade and economic relationships between neighbors could create many, many new jobs. And across the Mediterranean, Europe also represents enormous potential for greater trade and investment. If we were to reduce trade barriers in North Africa alone, just that one act could boost GDP levels by as much as 7 or 8 percent in Tunisia and Morocco, and it could lead to hundreds of millions of dollars in new wealth across the region every year.

The people of the Middle East and North Africa have the talent, they have the drive, to build vibrant economies and sustainable democracies – just as citizens have already done so in regions long held back by closed political and economic systems, from Southeast Asia to Eastern Europe to Latin America.

Now, it won't be easy. There are many, many obstacles. And unfortunately, Iran provides a powerful cautionary tale for the transitions underway. The democratic aspirations of 1979 were subverted by a new and brutal dictatorship. Iran's leaders have consistently pursued policies of violence abroad and tyranny at home. In Tehran, security forces have beaten, detained, and in several recent cases killed peaceful protesters, even as Iran's president has made a show of denouncing the violence against civilians in Libya and other places. And he is not alone in his hypocrisy. Al-Qaida's propagandists have tried to yoke the region's peaceful popular movements to their murderous ideology. Their claims to speak for the dispossessed and

downtrodden have never rung so hollow. Their arguments that the only way is violent change have never been so fully discredited.

Last month we witnessed a development that stood out, even in this extraordinary season. Colonel Qadhafi's troops turned their guns on their own people. His military jets and helicopter gunships had unleashed a rein of terror against people who had no means to defend themselves against the assault from the air. Benghazi's hundreds of thousands of citizens were in the crosshairs.

Now, in the past, when confronted with such a crisis, all too often the leaders of North Africa and the Middle East averted their eyes or closed ranks. But not this time. Not in this new era. The OIC, the GCC issued strong statements. The Arab League convened in Cairo, in the midst of all of the commotion of Egypt's democratic transition to condemn the violence and suspend Libya from the organization, even though Colonel Qadhafi held the League's rotating presidency. The Arab League went on to call for a no-fly zone. And I want to thank Qatar, the UAE, and Jordan for contributing planes to help enforce it.

But that's not all. The Arab League affirmed – and again I quote – “the right of the Libyan people to fulfill their demands and build their own future and institutions in a democratic framework.” That is a remarkable statement. And that is a reason to hope.

All the signs of progress we have seen in recent months will only be meaningful if more leaders in more places move faster and further to embrace this spirit of reform, if they work with their people to answer the region's most pressing challenges – to diversify their economies, open their political systems, crack down on corruption, respect the rights of all of their citizens, including women and minorities.

Those are the questions that will determine whether the people of the region make the most of this historic moment or fall back into stagnation.

The United States will be there as a partner, working for progress. We are committed to the future of this region and we believe in the potential of its people. We look forward to the day when all the citizens of the Middle East and North Africa – in fact, all around the world – have the freedom to pursue their own God-given potential. That is the future that all of us should be striving and working toward.

Thank you all very much. (Applause.)

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